

Our history:

St Clare Hospice over the years



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St Clare Hospice has been established for 25 years, providing specialist palliative care and support to more than 10,000 patients and their families across West Essex and the borders of East Hertfordshire.

Initial conversations about setting up a hospice service took place in 1987, when it was decided that a group should be established to investigate the need for an end-of-life palliative care service within West Essex.

The joint planning team was made up of local councillors, health and social care professionals, business owners, church representatives and residents, as well as a consultant from St Francis Hospice. In 1989, after an extensive period of research, the group held a public meeting, chaired by Jo Brennan, senior nurse and member of the West Essex Health Authority who was to become St Clare's first general manager. The findings showed a clear need for specialist care for those with a terminal or life-limiting illness in our community, and it was proposed and agreed that a hospice service should be established. That evening, the first donation was presented – a cheque for £5,000 from Essex Radio – and so, St Clare Hospice Trust was born.

It was proposed to name the new hospice service St Clare as an acknowledgement of the help and support the trust received in the early days by neighbouring St Francis Hospice, as St Clare was one of the first followers of St Francis of Assisi.

In 1990, a team of trustees were appointed and work began on creating a constitution and plan for how the service would function. One of those trustees, John Carr, raised £100 by placing a pint glass at a local pub. This sum was significant as it covered the cost of registering St Clare's name and status with the Charity Commission.

Later that year, a £40,000 grant was awarded by the Regional Health Authority, which meant the trustees were able to employ the first members of staff, with Janet Lodge and Stan Wright appointed as day care manager and voluntary services manager respectively along with volunteer administrator Beryl Cruickshank later that same year.

It was to prove a busy period for St Clare, with day services opening across the Hospice catchment area at Sumners Farmhouse in Harlow, Stansted Day Centre, Parsonage Court in Loughton, Jessops Court in Waltham Abbey and Myddleton Place in Saffron Walden. These venues provided weekly sessions of physical, social, emotional and spiritual care – the first of its kind in the area.

In those early days, St Clare services were provided largely thanks to the support of members of the community, who organised fundraising events such as fetes, coffee mornings and jumble sales, and in the first year raised £47,000 for the Hospice. This local fundraising activity continues today, helping to ensure St Clare can continue delivering its skilled and compassionate care to patients and their loved ones.

In 1992, the growing administrative work was based in the Pinnacles in Harlow thanks to the generous offer of free office space from a local businessman and Rotarian Kevin Pitt. Later that year, the trustees identified Stone Barton farmhouse in Hastingwood as a potential development site to build a permanent hospice building as St Clare's services continued to grow with the introduction of free equipment loan, a 24/7 helpline and family support services. The first Friends of St Clare group was also established that year.

In 1993, after a long campaign, the trustees purchased Stone Barton, meaning the existing day services operating across the Hospice patch could be centralised on one site. Requests for volunteers to help clean, decorate and set up the building were met by the community and an Challenge Anneka-style appeal run by Harlow's recently launched Ten17 radio station.

Two years later in 1995, a major capital appeal and building project was launched by BBC news broadcaster Martin Lewis to raise £1.85million to provide a purpose-built 8-bed Inpatient Unit (IPU), which opened shortly before the turn of the Millennium. This was made possible in part by the efforts of Gerry Bell through the creation of a profitable trading arm of St Clare in 1997, which included the weekly hospice lottery. St Clare was also grateful to the continued support of the community, which donated both time and money to see the IPU opened. The first St Clare shop in Harlow was also officially opened in 1995, with shops in Epping, Saffron Walden, Dunmow, Debden, Buckhurst Hill and Loughton following in later years.

In 2007, the Hospice introduced its Independent Living team, for the first time bringing a completed multidisciplinary team of occupational therapists, physiotherapists and therapy assistants under one roof. In 2008, the new-look Day Therapy service was launched, offering people the opportunity to engage in therapeutic activities, such as creative workshops and complementary therapy, designed to promote independence and normality.

In 2011, St Clare took over the Macmillan Nursing team from NHS West Essex, creating the St Clare Community Palliative Care Team to provide support, information and advice to patients and those involved in their care, such as GPs and District Nurses. A neurological group for patients and their carers was also set up in conjunction with South Essex Partnership Trust Community Neurological Specialist Nurses. That year, the Countess of Wessex visited the Hospice to officially unveil a major refurbishment of the IPU.

In 2013, the Hospice won £50,000 of Big Lottery funding for its 'Space to Breathe' family garden after becoming a finalist in the People's Millions competition in conjunction with ITV. The garden was officially opened in 2015 by St Clare patron and TV horticulturalist Christine Walkden.

January 2014 saw the launch of St Clare's Hospice at Home service, providing hands-on personal care in patients' own homes to those approaching the end of life, or when families need additional support. The St Clare Community Palliative Care Team was also expanded to cover seven-day working. St Clare also unveiled the results of a £472,000 refurbishment project funded by the Department of Health to provide inspiring, modern facilities to enhance the Hospice environment. St Clare's

Patient and Family Support team was also expanded with the recruitment of two social workers.

During 2015, the Hospice at Home service was extended to 24-hours, seven days a week to provide care during the night.

Chief executives:

Jo Brennan (1991-2000)
Brian Hilton (2000-2005)
Richard Cowie (2005-2011)
Tanya Curry (2011-present)

Chairman of trustees:

Tom Sweetman (1990-1993)
Ken Bushel (1993-2003)
Ian Paterson (2003-2004)
John Scott (2005-2006)
Michael Chapman (2006–2013)
Patrick Foster (2013–present)

Original trustees:

Letitia Berry
Kenneth Bushell
John McLean Carr
Anthony Gammon
John Glasspool
John Denby Hill
Ian Paterson
Peter Peet
Gloria Platt
Thomas Sweetman
John Scott
John Wickens
Paula Winter